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## **Notes for Contributors**

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Tables, illustrations, tables and captions should accompany all papers. However, these should be kept to a minimum.

## **DEFINING PROFESSIONAL STUDIES AND ITS PLACE IN THE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to contextualise the development of Professional Studies through highlighting conceptual and contextual problems that have bedevilled the evolution of the course. Value issues that have dominated the conception of Professional Studies are also explored. After exploring these issues the paper defines Professional Studies by looking at the components that make up Professional Competence. The components of Professional competence are used as a basis for suggesting the content that might be included in a Professional Studies course. The paper suggests that there is need to develop a knowledge base and a skills base in a Professional Studies Course.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Teacher Education programmes the world over have been evolving over the past thirty years. Noticeable changes have been in the area of curriculum content. In Zimbabwe, momentous changes followed the Lewis Taylor report (1974). The Lewis Taylor report was followed by the setting up of the T3 Working Party (1977) which was charged with the responsibility of tidying up the primary teacher training curriculum. The work of the T3 Working Party culminated in the 1978 syllabus regulations which are commonly referred to as the Pink Book.

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Further work on the content of teacher education curriculum continued after Independence in 1980. 1986 witnessed the coming together of teacher educators at Mkoba. The Mkoba Teacher Education conference represented a milestone in shaping the teacher education curriculum. At the conference a Teacher Education Review Committee was set up. It presented its findings which were adopted in December 1986.

One of the major features to emerge from the TERC report was the drama of upstaging of Professional Studies. The period 1986 - 1988 was characterised by sustained efforts to define Professional Studies as well as parcelling out its content. Finally, the Oasis Workshop of 1988 gave us what we label as Professional Studies today in the primary teachers' colleges.

But the big question that we need to answer is; what is Professional Studies? Before we map out a definition of Professional Studies, it may be prudent to look at two issues that may assist us in defining this area of teacher education - (1) earlier conceptions of Professional Studies and (2) conceptual and contextual problems involved in Professional Studies.

Up to the middle of the 1970s Professional Studies was a number of discrete courses having a highly instrumental focus on the teaching of curriculum subjects or areas, hence the label curriculum studies. The discrete courses were organizationally and conceptually unrelated to theorising about the context of teaching as it relates to pupils' development and learning, school and classroom organization, teacher roles and styles and student teachers' practical work in schools. This conception of Professional Studies arose from the clear distinction made between Education Studies (T.O.E.), Subject Studies, Professional Studies and School Experience (TP). This compartmentalisation of the teacher education curriculum tended to create problems and still does. Let us examine some of the conceptual and contextual problems that have bedeviled Professional Studies.

### 2.0 Conceptual and Contextual Issues in Professional Studies

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Value issues have dominated the conception of Professional Studies. A number of questions have been and are asked when we think of Professional Studies. Some of them are:

- For whom are we preparing student teachers - schools as they are (which schools?) or schools as they may become (which of the many predictions?)
- What qualities and skills do we expect to develop in student-teachers?
- What contribution do we expect our products to make to the process of education?
- In his/her mastery of the task of promoting learning, are we seeking to develop a competent technician or a professional who can conceptualise his/her activities and justify them in terms of explicit and defensible educational principles?

Answers to these questions may assist us to define the body of knowledge and skills required to shape the Professional Studies Course. In addition to the value questions, we also have the issue of education and training. The idea, that a teacher should be an educated person as well as a competent practitioner seems to underpin most of our teacher education courses. This raises the debate related to Academic vs Professional Components of teacher education.

The debate about what makes a teacher, Main Subject or Professional Studies, has been going on for long. Probably, there is no answer to it but two observations can be made:

1. The equation of personal education with Academic Study of a Main Subject suggests (a) that the other component, Professional Studies, is merely training with little intrinsically of educative value and (b) that mastery of an area of knowledge at an advanced level is not an essential professional prerequisite.
2. Institutional discussions and staff recruitment and deployment

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policies over the years may work against a genuine reconceptualisation of the personal/professional relationship.

I will return to this second point later, but now I want us to focus on theory and practice. Some educators assert that all you need to teach well is a thorough knowledge of your subject. However, there is more to it than this. On the other end of the continuum teacher educators assert that all a teacher needs to teach well is an understanding of children and the possession of appropriate classroom skills. Where does this leave us? Let us look at our own context.

Course planners in Teacher Education in Zimbabwe seem to accept as given that an intending teacher needs as a minimum:

- (i) some form of personal education which is intellectually challenging;
- (ii) a knowledge of children and educational processes;
- (iii) a knowledge of the subjects to be taught in schools;
- (iv) the skills to teach drawing on (ii) and (iii) in the most appropriate manner.

The above views are reflected in the structural organization of our teacher education programmes. The academic subjects supply the personal education and knowledge of the teaching subjects. Professional Studies deals with the knowledge of the teaching subject at school level and with some of the related executive skills. Further, executive skills are acquired and tested through school experience and Teaching Practice. Theory of Education provides the educational processes as opposed to the everyday, common sense knowledge acquired through Professional Studies and Teaching Practice.

This organisation represents a compartmentalisation of the components that constitute our teacher education programmes. Yet, the distinction between an academic knowledge of children and educational processes on an "everyday", intuitive, personal conceptualisation, arising from direct experience, is fundamental to teacher education and is linked to the most

confused and conceptually complex issue in teacher education debate - the theory/practice relationship.

Teacher education courses traditionally divide into T.O.E.; T.P. MS above the fray and PS having neither the rigour of theory nor the relevance of practice and, therefore, being beyond the pale. Professional Studies has tended to be seen as neither theoretically respectable nor practically valid. T.O.E. is seen as what gives the intending teacher the conceptual apparatus for making sense of his/her own and other's practice and the objective knowledge of children and learning on which to base considered teaching strategies. What problem does this pose?

We have used the terms Theory of Education and Teaching Practice to refer to what goes on in colleges and schools. In the process we have failed to distinguish between the use of words **theory** and **practice** as descriptive terms denoting forms of organisation and pedagogy and their use as epistemological terms. Thus, the supposedly context free word **theory** has become synonymous with **courses** in psychology, philosophy, sociology etc. The whole debate about the theory/practice relationship has failed to do what was most needed; to explore and define what we ought to mean, conceptually, by **theory** and **practice**.

For most students, what they perceive as the theoretical and the practical components of their courses seem unrelated. This is the problem to which many teacher educators have increasingly addressed themselves in recent years. This is probably what has given impetus to the development of Professional Studies as a deliberate attempt to establish the link between theory and practice.

Finally, let us look at the institutional context to see what problems have influenced the conceptualisation of Professional Studies. There are problems in the operationalisation of Professional Studies programmes. Operationalising Professional Studies is highly complex and is susceptible to local influences. Professional Studies can emerge as one sort of concept and activity in college a) and something wholly different in college b), uniquely



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responsive to local professional needs. This can be a strength but it can make Professional Studies fail to rise from the parochial concerns of the institution. It may take its shape by default, as what remains when the conceptually more coherent and, therefore, politically more powerful area like Main Subject and Theory of Education have carved up the time-table and assessment procedures between them. Partly the marginality of Professional Studies is a result of the overall structure and of the professional identities in colleges. Most lecturers appointed to teach in colleges were teaching in secondary schools. Single subject allegiance offers the most readily secure professional identity to a teacher educator because has the most universal currency.

The English lecturer is happy teaching English and acquires both personal satisfaction and academic status. He/she feels that he/she is enabling future teachers to know their subject. How does a Professional Studies lecturer explain himself/herself? What are his formal qualifications? What, precisely and in terms that non-educationists can understand, is the nature of his/her job? What is his/her professional reference group - academics or practitioners? Put simply, in terms of existing criteria the Professional Studies lecturer may be hard-pressed either to define what he/she is doing or to justify its importance and his/her claim to expertise. This lack of status on the part of the Professional Studies lecturer filters down to the area itself.

The marginal role assigned to Professional Studies can be gleaned in the history of Professional Studies. Until recently it was unusual for Professional Studies to exist as an organisational entity as Main Subject and Theory of Education did. Professional Studies was the pride of no single group but was seen as additional commitments for the various subject departments. Collectively, Professional Studies lacked coherence and how seriously it was taken depended on the values of the Head of Department and his colleagues. Usually, in college decision making, nobody was available to fight for Professional Studies.

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Professional Studies was, until recently, an area in which external assessors took little interest in. Main Subject and Theory of Education were seen as the Diploma taught courses. They were externally examined.

This sorry state of affairs, we are happy to note, no more prevails. Colleges have taken steps to ensure that Professional Studies is at the heart of the diploma programme. Attempts to raise the status of Professional Studies have been backed by policy statements and guidelines from D.T.E.

### 3.0 Defining Professional Studies

We have explored the problematic nature of Professional Studies without defining what it is. Let us turn to this aspect. There are several ways of looking at Professional Studies. We can say Professional Studies is a process of intellectual enquiry and analysis leading to the development of subject non-specific classroom skills. We can also say that Professional Studies incorporates and integrates theoretical studies of educational ideas and processes with the study of pedagogy in school subjects in context and with practical experience in schools. This is the antithesis of looking at theory, school experience and how to teach a particular subject as discrete elements.

Hirst (1979) says Professional Studies is that part of the diploma course intended to equip the student teacher to carry out his/her teaching role or job.

Alexander and Hirst (1979) point out that this function of Professional Studies requires us to have a suitable account of the teacher's role or job. Until we know what the job is, how can we possibly know what it is for a person to be equipped to carry it out. We can say the new teacher's job is composed of the duties and responsibilities the teacher will as a matter of fact be faced. Professional Studies is, therefore, concerned with the job that the newly qualified teacher will actually do in schools as they exist, not as they might exist in some ideal society. The student-teacher has, therefore, necessarily to be properly trained to do the job of the appointment he/she accepts as well as to critically reflect on its framework and his/her responsibilities in relation to that.

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We need, then, an adequate description of what students will be asked to do when they accept their appointment as teachers. The description we come up with must spell out the details of the judgements and activities that will come the teacher's way. Until we do that Professional Studies will continue to be inadequately based.

In coming up with an adequate job description we need to ask ourselves; what are the elements that contribute to the Professional conduct of that job?

Hirst (1979) suggests that there are four elements that contribute to professionalism of any kind. First, the professional practitioner must possess the knowledge and understanding necessary for rationally judging what ought to be done in carrying out his/her task. This involves understanding the nature of the job and what it aims to achieve, the context in which he/she must operate, possible alternative courses of action and factors governing their likely results.

Secondly, he/she must be able, in the light of all the knowledge and understanding, to make rationally defensible practical judgements as to what to do exactly in given circumstances. Thirdly, the professional must have the necessary skills to actually carry out effectively what he/she judges ought to be done. Fourthly, he/she must have an appropriate set of dispositions such that he/she actually does as his/her understanding and judgement direct.

Hirst's way of looking at what is required of a professional can assist us to define Professional Studies as well as mapping out the kind of content we would include in our Professional Studies curriculum. In addition, Hirst's views assist us to come up with the purposes served by the Professional Studies course. Professional Studies is intended to develop professional competence in our student teachers. Isolating the components that make up professional competence will assist us in determining what Professional Studies is.

We have said Hirst and Alexander's characterisation of what is required of a professional to perform his/her job efficiently assists us to map out the

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content of a Professional Studies curriculum. But before we attempt that, let us consider why we should take Professional Studies as a central component of a teacher education programme.

Professional Studies requires a student teacher to have an analytical grasp of the inter-related elements of the practice of teaching. It makes the same demands of the teacher educators. A firm grasp of the inter-related elements of the practice of teaching leads teacher educators to understand the implicit and explicit features of the practices student-teachers need to master. In addition, such a grasp helps them to assist student teachers discern in their own and other's practices the complex goal they are pursuing in a given context. Professional Studies enables teacher educators to select training activities and determine how the activities can be directed to help students develop skills in facilitating meaningful learning.

The point being made is that Professional Studies is a key component of any Teacher Education programme because it is through Professional Studies that we can develop and sharpen students' professional competence. The notion of professional competence brings us back to the requirements for a professional outlined earlier on. Professional competence can be broken into five components: subject competence, subject application, management of the class and pupils' learning, assessment and monitoring of pupils learning and further professional development.

Let us briefly look at each of these components. **Subject Knowledge** can be viewed from two perspectives. We can view it as concerned with content mastery that a teacher should achieve before he/she can teach. On the other hand subject knowledge deals with pedagogical content knowledge which provides the teacher with knowledge of the theories that inform the pedagogical judgements and choices the teacher has to make in the process of teaching.

The second component of professional competence is **subject application**. This involves the teachers' ability to select and make appropriate use of

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subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to facilitate learning. In other words, what knowledge and skills does the teacher possess which enable him/her to transform subject matter in ways that promote pupil learning through the use of the most appropriate forms of representation of concepts. Subject application relates, therefore, to the teacher's ability and skills in thinking through the key concepts to be taught and selecting alternative ways of representing them to learners.

**Subject application** does not happen in a vacuum. Sound class **management** complements the teacher's subject application strategies.

Sound class management, among other things, deals with:

- creating conditions that promote optimum learning;
- establishing an incorporative classroom;
- establishing and maintaining a working consensus;
- organising the class into groups for particular learning activities;
- skills in motivating learners;
- pacing lesson delivery according to the capacity of the learners;
- providing appropriate feedback in a variety of forms.

Teaching does not end with successful management of the learning context. The teacher needs to be skilled in assessing how effective his/her teaching has been. He/she does this through **monitoring pupils' progress**. The teacher has to have skills in recording and reporting comparative information about pupils' learning progress in relation to that of other pupils in the same learning context. Professional Studies should assist teachers in selecting the most appropriate procedures and instruments for assessing pupils' performance.

In today's teacher education climate, it is being increasingly accepted that learning to teach is not like an immunisation process where you get one jab for life. There is need for continued professional growth. Professional Studies should assist teachers in developing ways of sustaining their

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professional growth. This professional growth will enrich the teacher's competence in the other components outlined above.

Our characterisation of Professional Studies suggests certain kinds of content for the course.

What kind of content might we include in a Professional Studies Course?

### 4.0 The Content of a Professional Studies Course

- One way of deciding on the content of a professional studies course would be to think of professional competence as requiring propositional knowledge and practical knowledge. Propositional knowledge would entail an understanding of:
  - 
  - The ways in which children develop and learn.
  - The variety of pupils in terms of ability, behaviour, social background and culture.
  - Human relationships in schools; processes of interaction within a teaching and learning group.
  - Expected performance of children of differing ages, abilities, aptitudes and backgrounds.
  - Learning difficulties; giftedness; disadvantage.
  - Ethical, spiritual and aesthetic values of society as well as its political, economic and legal foundations.

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- The ways in which society and schools are interrelated - ways in which the background of pupils influences what they bring to their learning.
- The purposes of the curriculum and its relationship to the wider society.
- Principles of assessment (HMI 1983: pp 10-1.)
- The other limb, practical knowledge, would focus on issues pertaining to:
  - Communication skills.
  - Creating a conducive learning environment.
  - Preparing schemes of work and lesson plans.
  - Educational media and technology.
  - Organization of class, group and individual work.
  - Selection, analysis and preparation of teaching and learning materials.
  - Techniques of presentation.
  - Assessment models.

The above check lists would form the minimum requirements but they are by no means exhaustive nor are they prescriptions. They are included here to provide a basis for dialogue that may shape trends that can provide frameworks for improved Professional Studies Courses.

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The other broad division for a Professional Studies Course that Pactor (1984) proposes relates to professional skills. Professional skills lie at the heart of the initial teacher preparation process but it is not easy to specify the core professional skills that a student teacher would need. Stones, (1979, 1984 and 1994) has made significant contributions towards identifying and defining the professional skills necessary for effective concept teaching. He argues that professional skills encompass complex cognitive activities and not merely simple motor activities. Motor activities are a manifestation of the deep structures of teaching ability which constitute the underlying mastery of principles and their practical application in helping pupils to develop effective learning strategies.

Like professional knowledge, the professional skills dimension of the content of Professional Studies can be divided into two broad entities - classroom organization and curriculum issues.

### **Classroom Organisation and Pedagogical Action**

Although it is difficult to specify with certainty the professional skills required of an effective teacher, it is possible to isolate some basic skill areas. The following content would need to be included in any Professional Studies Course:

- Integration of subject knowledge and pedagogy.
- Classroom knowledge.
- Development of adequate learning tasks.
- Organisation of pupils' learning activities.
- Monitoring the continuity in learning activities.
- Adaptation of learning materials to the differences between pupils.
- Pupil guidance (pastoral care).
- Creating conditions for pupil motivation.
- Supporting pupils to play their role in the group.
- Providing feedback.

### **Curricular Skills**



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Proctor (1984) singles out the area of curricular skills as a problematic one because of lack of adequate research data to go by. In Zimbabwe, Professional Studies Courses do not seem to play close attention to this aspect. Issues concerning curriculum design, implementation and evaluation are hardly considered to lie in the domain of Professional Studies. It is the contention here that curricular skills should be focused on as the second limb of professional skills to be developed during initial teacher preparation.

Curricular skills content might include topics such as:

1. Formulating and interpreting syllabus aims and objectives.
2. The philosophy behind the organisation of the curriculum.
3. Rationale for the teaching of the various subjects on the curriculum.
4. Access to the national curriculum: issues and problems.
5. Models of curriculum organisation.
6. Syllabus interpretation.
7. Approaches to curriculum implementation: modular, disciplinary, integrative etc.
8. Designing school syllabuses from national syllabuses.
9. School and national examinations.
10. Time-tabling.

### 5.0 Implementing the Professional Studies Curriculum

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In the sections above possible content for a Professional Studies Course has been suggested. However, problems of content selection pale into insignificance when compared with problems of implementation. What strategy is ideal for implementing a Professional Studies Course? There is no easy answer to this question but some tentative approaches can be suggested.

We can adopt a linear approach to implement our Professional Studies Course. A linear approach means that the PS course has to be time-tabled just like T.O.E. and the discipline areas. They then would run parallel. We can divide our students into groups so that they have the opportunity to go for Professional Studies in small enough groups. The Professional Studies course would run throughout the year like any other course.

The other approach we can adopt is the modular approach. The modular approach requires learners to attend to a course for a specific time in the year. They cover the required content and are examined and they move on to doing something else. In terms of time-tabling this would require the Professional Studies course to be twined with another course so that students rotate from one course to another.

In addition to the above two approaches, we can adopt the integrated approach to Professional Studies. Integration involves moving away from compartmentalized courses towards a set of co-ordinated core and option courses. Integration can be at the teaching or learning level. Largely the concept of integration is underpinned by the notion of wholeness or unity of knowledge. It accepts the uniqueness of the various disciplines or subjects while at the same time recognizing their inter-connectedness. For example, Maths may make use of concepts in English or Geography etc. Themes or topics may be used to provide an integrating element in the curriculum. Those aspects of the themes/topics that have an interdisciplinary span are accorded primacy. In terms of implementation this would entail clustering subjects for purposes of teaching Professional Studies.

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In this paper, I cannot claim to have done justice to the question of the role of Professional Studies in Teacher Education. All I can hope is that I have provided some beacons that can guide us as we try to construct and shape the Professional Studies curriculum in our various colleges.

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